



Sicha Summary

Chelek 15 | Vayishlach | Sichah 2

The Verse:

I have been diminished by all the kindness and by all the truth You have done Your servant; for with my staff I have crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps (*Bereishis* 32:11).

Two Explanations:

There are two explanations of the phrase, “for with my staff I crossed this Jordan”:

- 1) The straightforward explanation — Yaakov describes how destitute he was when he first crossed the Jordan while fleeing Eisav; all he had was his staff. This magnifies G-d’s subsequent kindness to Yaakov, “and now I have become two camps.”
- 2) The *Midrashic* explanation — Yaakov split the Jordan river with his staff and then crossed it on dry land. (*Tanchuma, Vayeitzei* 3)

The Question:

These two explanations seem to be contradictory. According to the simple meaning, “with my staff” emphasizes Yaakov’s weakness and poverty. According to the *Mirdash*, it highlights Yaakov as being deserving of the greatest miracle.

The Groundwork:

The Psalmist says, “You have done justice and righteousness with Jacob.” (*Tehillim* 99:4). Seemingly, justice and righteousness are contradictory concepts. When we ask G-d to deal justly with us, we are confident that we

are deserving and that we will stand up to the scrutiny of G-d's judgment. When we ask for righteousness, we acknowledge our deficiencies and ask G-d to deal with us righteously — with kindness, even though we are undeserving.

How can we ask for G-d to take both approaches simultaneously?

When a person can demand G-d's reward based on strict justice, yet instead he asks for G-d's charity and righteousness, it is indicative of the person's humility. He is not enamored with his own accomplishments and does not consider himself worthy of reward. He has abandoned his rational claim and has escaped the confines of his own ego.

This elicits a similar response from G-d: Just as this person lacks any notion of self-importance, and therefore, he does not appeal to the natural, orderly reward he deserves, so too G-d acts beyond the orderly realm of reward, gracing this person with boundless blessing.

The Explanation:

This explains how both explanations of the verse are simultaneously true: On the one hand, Yaakov deserved the greatest miracles; on the other hand, he felt himself to be spiritually lacking, possessing only a simple “staff.” He justly deserved G-d's rewards, but he asked for kindness out of humility.

The Alter Rebbe's Letter:

In his well-known letter based on this verse, published shortly after his release from Czarist imprisonment, the Alter Rebbe writes, “Yaakov regarded himself as utterly insignificant on account of the multitude of [G-d's] favors [as he said], ‘for [only] with my staff...,’ and he considered himself as being utterly unfit and unworthy to be saved.” (*Iggeres Hakodesh*, Epistle 2)

If the Alter Rebbe wanted to express that Yaakov felt overwhelmed by G-d's kindness, why did the Alter Rebbe cite only the words, “for [only] with my staff,” which, according to its simple meaning, refers to Yaakov's poverty,

rather than citing the end of the verse, “now I have become two camps,” a literal description of G-d’s kindness?

In light of the above discussion, we can understand this citation as follows: The words “for only with my staff” allude to Yaakov’s deep humility, his sense of himself as undeserving despite him truly being deserving. Yaakov’s humility elicited G-d’s boundless blessing. Recognizing this profusion of blessing in his life, Yaakov felt overwhelmed by what, in his self-conception, was undeserved Divine kindness.

The Lesson:

“Every Jew is the child of the King” (see *Shabbos* 67a), and is therefore deserving of every good thing in this world. Nevertheless, there is suffering, for suffering humbles a person, deflating his ego. But if we emulate Yaakov and achieve an inner humility, always feeling that there is more room for spiritual advancement, then we will elicit G-d’s open and revealed kindness, and eliminate any need for suffering, G-d forbid.